



With affection and candor, LBJ's brother tells of Johnson's bitter feud with Bobby Kennedy, his "miserable" years as Vice President, his agony—and occasional doubts—about the war in Vietnam, his isolation from his daughters and his angry reaction to a joke about Lee Harvey Oswald

My Brother Lyndon by Sam Houston Johnson

EDITED BY ENRIQUE HANK LOPEZ

ABOUT SIX WEEKS BEFORE he announced that he would not seek reelection, my brother Lyndon called my room at the White House at around 2:00 a.m. and asked me to join him for a game of dominoes. When I got downstairs, he was hunched over the table staring at a pile of dominoes in front of him. He seemed worried and was probably hoping that a game would distract him for a while.

Back in the old days, we used to play dominoes with some of his close friends on the Hill. His partner would be Jake Pickle or Homer Thornberry, and Lynda or Luci would team up with me.

I soon discovered that Lyndon and Jake would pass signals to each other on the sly. Lyndon would lean back and say, "Wonder what ever happened to Judge Stokes?"

And Jack would look over his stack and answer, "Don't reckon I know, Lyndon. Ain't seen Stokes for a long time."

Well, obviously "Judge Stokes" was just a code name for some particular domino—a double-deuce or a three or something else. So Lyndon was really saying that he had deuces, and Jake was saying *he* didn't have any.

Knowing they were trying to pull a fast one, I would scramble their damned code. "Hell, I saw Judge Stokes just this morning," I would say. "Saw him two or three times before noon."

Now that would really puzzle my brother, because we both knew that Judge Stokes was down in

San Antonio, over a thousand miles away. Therefore, he could only conclude that I was on to their secret signals and that I might have more deuces than he had; so then he would hold back his deuce to keep me from going out. But since I really didn't have any deuces, he'd be trapped by his own trick.

Of course, there were a lot of his tricks I couldn't figure out, no matter how hard I tried. Lyndon has a theory about dominoes, a very complex system of moves and countermoves and countercountermoves that will confuse even a smart man like Walt Rostow, who taught at MIT.

Still, with all his tricks, Lyndon occasionally loses—and he's not a very good loser. I remember one game when Lyndon had only one domino left. Snake eyes, one on each side. Not knowing what he had, I put down a six-one that covered a blank-one at his end of the table.

"That's a stupid move," he said with some annoyance. "Why don't you cover this six over here with the double-six in your hand? Hell, Sam, you ought to know you're supposed to play your big numbers at the end." Well, I knew right there and then that I had blocked him off, that he'd been fixing to cover the one.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said, pretending to be awful generous with me. "I'll let you take it back so you can play your double-six."

"No, Lyndon. I'll just stay where I am,"

"Now that's pretty damned stupid, Sam." He continued

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was filed up now. "Here I am, giving you a chance to play it right, and you're being stubborn."

He got so irritated I almost laughed, but I managed to keep a straight face as he reached for another domino still mumbling about how dumb I was. After the next move, I finished the game and left him with that double-one still in his hand. "You wouldn't have beat me," he growled, "if you'd played right—the way you're supposed to, damn it!"

It was all for fun, of course, even when we got annoyed with each other. But he wasn't in the mood for any light stuff on the particular night in February, 1968, when I came downstairs to join him. He was having one of those sleepless nights that make an old man of anyone who becomes President.

We laid out the dominoes and started our game, but after a few moves, I realized his mind was somewhere else. I was waiting for him to make his move, but he just sat there, hunched over the table, absentmindedly fingering a double-blank and staring at some distant point far beyond the room. There was a look of loneliness and deep anguish in his eyes, and his mouth was set tight. "It's your move, Lyndon," I said, trying to distract him. He didn't hear me. He just sat there, staring way off yonder. And finally, after a long, weary silence, he slouched back in his chair and said:

"That's just the trouble, Sam Houston—it's always my move. And, damn it, I sometimes can't tell whether I'm making the right move or not. Now take this Vietnam mess: How in the hell can anyone know for sure what's right and what's wrong, Sam? I got some of the finest brains in this country—people like Dean Rusk, Walt Rostow and Dean Acheson—making some awful strong and convincing arguments for us to stay in there and not pull out. Then I've got some people like George Ball and Fulbright, also intelligent men, whose motives I can't rightly distrust—and then telling me we've got to de-escalate or run the risk of a total war. And, Sam, I've got to listen to both sides."

He paused a while, still pinching that blank domino with his big, rough fingers. His eyes looked sadder than I've ever seen them, and I couldn't help thinking about all those damn dirty hippies calling my brother a murderer.

"Sam Houston," he finally said, "I've just got to choose between my opposing experts. No way of avoiding it. But I sure as hell wish I could really know what's right."

Then pulling himself out of his chair, he wrapped his robe around him and started to leave,

his loose slippers clapping a little on the carpet. I saw him to the door and watched him shuffle down the hall toward the elevator on his way to the Situation Room in the basement to get the three o'clock report from Saigon.

When I was four or five years old, I would get up before sunrise to make the fire in our coal stove while my daddy shaved in the flickering light of a kerosene lamp hung over the kitchen sink.

Then we would sit down at the kitchen table and casually eat the breakfast he had cooked—fried eggs, smoked ham, hominy grits or huge servings of pan-fried potatoes, all of it freely sprinkled with Tabasco sauce. Sitting there in the half-light of dawn, my feet not quite reaching the floor, I would listen hours on end to Daddy's stories about the legislature in Austin.

After a while, when the sun was staring hard through the windows, Lyndon and my sisters would come in with my mother, and we would all sit around the kitchen talking about most anything. But much as I appreciated the more general family conversations, I preferred those long early-morning sessions alone with my daddy—sort of talking man-to-man, even though I was only four or five years old.

Lyndon never had that kind of relationship with Daddy. There was always a kind of tension between them, a sort of competition

that frequently occurs between a father and the oldest son. Even in small unimportant matters, they seemed to be competing. Lyndon sometimes objected to certain aspects of my daddy's life-style—drinking, for example. This was during the early stages of Prohibition, when most of the menfolk in our town used to get together for an afternoon beer at a saloon down on Main Street. Since Lyndon was only 12 or 13 years old, I guess he didn't realize that 3.2 beer was about as intoxicating as soda pop. Or maybe it was just the smelly saloon that Lyndon couldn't stand. Whatever his reason, he once got together a couple of friends, and they stood outside the saloon.

"Come on home! Come on home!" they kept shouting, holding the swinging doors wide open so all the drinkers could see them.

At first, my daddy thought it was all a joke. So did his friends. He even offered Lyndon a quarter to leave the place, and that was a right good bribe in those days. But when Lyndon refused it, outright refused it, my daddy knew it was serious. No, sir—nobody could sway Lyndon when he had his back up. Well, after staying a while to let his friends know he wasn't yielding to pressure from a mere kid, Daddy came on back home somewhat mortified

and rather annoyed with my brother.

That was only one example of how stubborn and independent Lyndon could be. No one could boss him or even persuade him to do anything he didn't want to do. Even as a very small boy, he always resisted the authority of my grandmother, who lived at our home and took care of us while Daddy was legislating in Austin and Mama was working at her newspaper office.

It was a battle of wills between Grandma and Lyndon, culminating with frustrated tears on her part and stiff-lipped silence on his. More than once, she told my folks and anyone else who would listen, "That boy is going to end up in the penitentiary—just mark my words!"

I also used to embarrass Lyndon by certain things I did. He was particularly mortified by some of the outside jobs I had when I was about nine years old, such as shining shoes on Main Street and sweeping out the church. But I managed to earn a few nickels, and finally saved up \$11.20. That's when Lyndon approached me with a business proposition. "How about you and me goin' partners, Sam Houston?" he asked. "Get together and buy us a secondhand bicycle."

I couldn't have been more pleased. I rushed into the house and got my bank (an old tobacco pouch) from under a loose floorboard in the pantry and followed Lyndon down to the bicycle shop.

I don't remember what we paid for the bicycle, but I imagine my savings covered most of the price. Whatever the cost, it was certainly a beautiful bike.

There was just one problem: It was too damned big for me. My toes could barely reach one pedal when it was in the up position, the other pedal being at least eight inches beyond my other foot. For Lyndon, who was a tall, gangling 15-year-old with legs like a grasshopper, the bike was a perfect size.

Apparently sensing my sudden doubts, my brother tried to perk up my spirits.

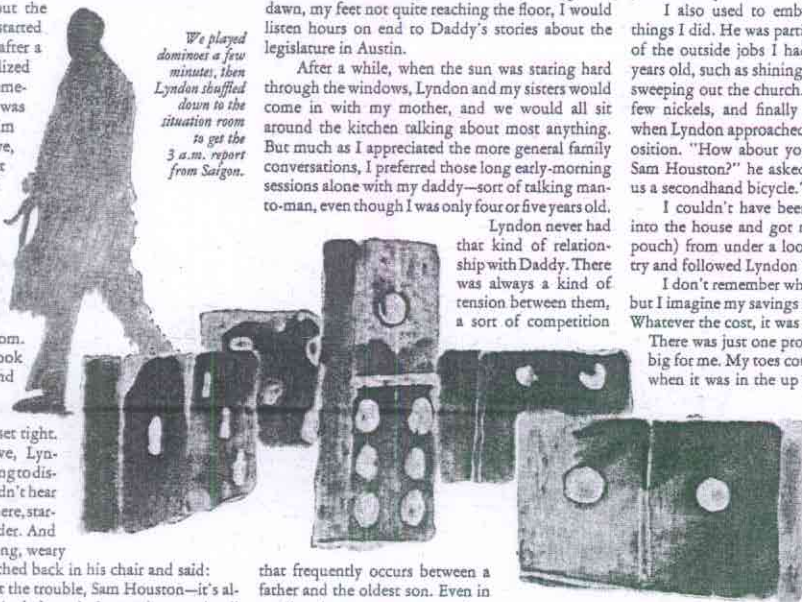
"I'll let you have the first ride," he said. "You can be the senior partner."

He helped me onto the seat and gave me a shove down this dirt road with a slight incline. Unable to reach the fast-moving pedals as the bicycle picked up speed, I soon panicked and turned the handlebars with a desperate jerk that sent me sprawling into a nearby ditch. Fortunately, the ground was soft there, so I wasn't hurt much. I just lay there staring at the overturned bike. Then I let out a bellow like a lost calf, tears spouting from my eyes like two gushers as Lyndon ran up to take care of me. "Don't cry, Sam," he kept saying, his skinny arm around my skinnier shoulders. "I'll teach you how to do it right."

Well, he never got a chance to—at least not on that bicycle. When my daddy came home that night and heard about my accident and about our partnership, he gave Lyndon a lecturing he never forgot. "You give Sam Houston his money back," he finally said, in a low threatening voice. "And don't you ever make a deal like that again."

Besides getting my money returned, I got a

We played dominoes a few minutes, then Lyndon shuffled down to the situation room to get the 3 a.m. report from Saigon.



brand-new midget bicycle from Daddy, and my brother taught me how to ride it without putting my hands on the handlebars. (But I wish to hell Lyndon hadn't taken our daddy's admonition too seriously, because I'd sure like to be his partner right now.)

LYNDON WAS INFORMALLY ENGAGED just after his graduation from Southwest Texas State Teachers College to one of the prettiest girls on campus and the daughter of the richest man in town, who also happened to be a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan. Since our daddy was a Populist and agrarian reformer, her daddy reacted quite negatively when she told him of her plans to marry Lyndon.

"I won't let you," he said. "I won't have my daughter marrying into that no-account Johnson family. I've known that bunch all my life, one generation after another of shiftless dirt farmers and grubby politicians. Always sticking together and leeching on one another, so the minute one starts to make it, the others drag him down. None of them will ever amount to a damn."

He probably said a lot more nasty things about the Johnsons, but that's the part she (poor naïve girl) later reported to Lyndon, no doubt intending to marry him in spite of her father's objections. Well, she never got a chance to express her own feelings. Lyndon never let her.

"To hell with your daddy," he said. "I wouldn't marry you or anyone in your whole damned family. But he's right about us Johnsons sticking together—we always have and always will, and we sure don't need to mix with your family to get along. We'll make it our own way. And you can tell your daddy that someday I'll be President of this country. You watch and see."

WITH A LONG LINE of preachers in her family background, including the one who baptized Sam Houston, Mama was naturally quite loyal to the Baptist Church. My father, on the other hand, didn't practice much of anything. Though not exactly an atheist or agnostic, he never seemed to give much thought to a formal religion. Still, he was deeply committed to certain ideas that you might consider religious. He was certainly a believer in the dignity of all human beings regardless of race or creed, and some of that rubbed off on all of us.

Daddy didn't go to church very often, practically never, nor did my brother and I until many years later. Sometimes, in a half-humorous mood, my sister Becky will tell people that "Lyndon never set foot in a church till he got to be President."

She's joking, of course. We both know he started going to church fairly often even before he was elected to the Senate. It was Lady Bird who encouraged his churchgoing, mostly to Episcopalian services, after their marriage in 1934. When he was Vice President, he attended church regularly, and then his every-Sunday attendance was widely publicized when he became President. There were a number of cynics who openly accused him of "courting the church vote" by going from one denomination to another—Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Quaker. They were dead wrong. I am personally convinced that the Presidency, with all its terrible and awesome burdens, made him feel a desperate need for greater spiritual comfort. In going from one church to another, I think he was unconsciously searching for some special type of

solace, a kind of spiritual ease that no President can hope to have.

When Luci converted to Catholicism before her marriage to Pat Nugent, no doubt irritating some of her kinfolk back home, my brother took a special interest in her new religion and frequently went to church with her. Though it's pretty late in life for him to change, I've heard Lady Bird speculating that he might someday convert to Catholicism: That wouldn't surprise me, but I am sure some members of the Johnson clan will find it hard to take.

LYNDON BECAME SECRETARY to Rep. Richard Kleberg of Texas shortly after Kleberg's election in 1931.

Easily the richest man in Congress, Kleberg had a flair for social life and was only too happy to have a diligent resourceful assistant "tending the store." In no time at all, Lyndon took charge of the office and became a sort of congressman *de facto*.

Kleberg was quite pleased when Lyndon got himself elected Speaker of what was known as the Little Congress. This was a group composed of congressional secretaries and administrative aides to the senators. Though the Little Congress had no official functions, it gave my live-wire brother an opportunity to meet and become intimate friends with congressional secretaries from all over the country. And in the course of their leisurely socializing, he learned an awful lot about their bosses, about their strengths and weaknesses, their pet legislative projects, their ties with other congressmen and their real political inclinations, as opposed to their public views. He absorbed all that information because he had (still has) the kind of mental computer that never rejects any data, however irrelevant it may seem at the moment of input.

LBJ sometimes asked me:
"Goddamn it, are
you working for me or the
lousy power company?"

IN 1937, REP. JAMES P. BUCHANAN, whose district covered Austin and the surrounding area, died suddenly, and a special election was called to fill the vacancy. Several prominent men immediately became contenders: C. M. Avery, Buchanan's campaign manager and staff director; Burton L. Harris, a lawyer; Robert Sheldon, a well-known local politician, and several others.

Thinking it might be risky to go against a large field in a winner-take-all election, Avery let the word get around that Buchanan's widow ought to run unopposed for the unexpired term. He figured that his own chances would then be much better in a regular primary election the following year. Not wanting to offend Mrs. Buchanan, everybody sat back waiting for her to make a decision.

Lyndon went down to Johnson City to talk this matter over with Daddy.

"Don't go waiting on her," he told Lyndon. "That's just some damned stallin' tactic by Avery. He just wants an easier shot later on. You go ahead

and announce right away. The minute Mrs. Buchanan knows she's got opposition, she won't get in. Hell, Lyndon, she's too damned old to campaign."

That's all my brother needed to hear. He probably had the same gut reaction all along, but wanted confirmation from an old pro he could trust. That same evening, he rode back to Austin and officially announced his intention to run. And within 48 hours, nine other candidates, including Avery, tossed their hats into the ring. True to my daddy's prediction, Buchanan's widow declined to make the race.

With the aid of an initial campaign contribution of \$10,000 from Lady Bird, Lyndon launched his first campaign for public office at the age of 29. We called each other nearly every night to discuss this or that strategy, mulling over some issue that might have popped up that very day. And once in a while, he would use me as a kind of long-distance straight man. "Are you sure Sam Rayburn said that?" he would say, apropos of nothing I had said: "You actually heard him tell Wright Patman that Avery would be a weak sister?"

Since I had said nothing of the sort, I realized he was just pretending for the benefit of someone listening to his end of the conversation, perhaps some local politician who was wavering between Lyndon and Avery. We had used this ploy before, both of us, having no doubt learned it from Daddy.

IN 1937, PRESIDENT Franklin D. Roosevelt had proposed what instantly became known as "the bill to pack the Supreme Court"—to expand the Court's membership to 15 so he could name some liberal justices. It was easily the most controversial and most universally-damned proposal he had ever made. Most Democratic congressmen and other politicians strongly opposed it but didn't want to openly buck an immensely popular President, so they chose to keep mum. Lyndon, however, favored the plan and decided to make it the main issue of his campaign. Radio commentators started saying that this special congressional election would be a test of public sentiment on FDR's plan to pack the Court. The President, of course, was well aware that a young man named Lyndon Johnson was taking a big gamble on his pet project. The gamble paid off—Lyndon got twice as many votes as his nearest rival.

Roosevelt, who was fishing in the Gulf of Mexico when he heard the results, welcomed Lyndon aboard his boat and later invited him on his special train, and said to him, "If you ever have any trouble getting things for your district, just come straight to the White House and talk to Tommy Corcoran or Sam Rosenman. I'll tell them to take good care of you."

By cultivating his elders in Congress and making strategic use of his special pipeline to FDR, Lyndon got more than his share of federally financed projects for his Tenth District.

During his early years in the House of Representatives, Lyndon asked me to move in with him and Lady Bird, letting me have the spare room in their relatively modest house at 1910 Kalorama Road. I lived in their various homes (including the White House) for many years—before, between and after my two marriages, both of which ended in divorce. I guess Lyndon wanted me close by so that he could keep a big-brotherly eye on all my extracurricular activities. He had never approved of my fancy apartment or my having a valet at the age of continued

23. And since he still wore baggy, ready-made suits from Sears, Roebuck, my custom-made clothes also offended his sense of prudent frugality.

Both he and Lady Bird have always had an inordinately high respect for tight budgets—not stingy, mind you, but certainly never wasteful. Time and again, when I had fallen asleep reading, he would come into my room and shake my shoulder to wake me up. And when I'd finally open my bleary eyes, he would snap off my light with the same one-sentence lecture every time: "Goddamn it, Sam Houston—are you working for me or the lousy power company?" Then he would stomp out of the room with some grumbling complaint about waste.

I just can't remember how many times he's done that, but he has never stopped doing it. Seven or eight times, when I was staying on the family floor of the White House, he came into my room to put off my light. That's one of the reasons I preferred to live on the third floor. He still might come upstairs, but it would be a little harder on him. So help me, if everybody followed Lyndon's example, the power companies would go broke.

My brother also worried about my occasional carousing and night-living and would frequently wait for me to come home (sometimes way after midnight) so he could chew me out for drinking too much. He himself drank fairly regularly, but always managed to remain in complete control of himself. In all the years I've known him, I have seen my brother drunk only once. Even then, he couldn't resist being the big brother.

He had been out at the Burning Tree Club all afternoon with Sen. George Smathers (D., Fla.). They had planned to play golf but adjourned to the bar for a few drinks when it started raining. Well, the rain never stopped, and Lyndon finally absorbed more bourbon than he generally did. When he got home after dark, his clothes soaked through to the skin and his hair plastered down with rain (it was still pouring), he came into my room, snapped my light on and shook my shoulder.

"Wake up, Sam Houston," he said in a thick voice. "Wake up and look at me."

Lady Bird, who had followed him into the room, tried to calm him. "Come on, honey. Leave Sam alone. Come on to bed."

"Just leave me alone, Bird," he slurred. "I want Sam Houston to look at me. Yes, by God, I want you to take a damned good look at me, Sam Houston. Open your eyes and look at me. 'Cause I'm drunk, and I want you to see how you look to me, Sam Houston, when you come home drunk."

"Okay, Lyndon," I said, turning my back. "I've seen you."

"No you don't," he persisted, turning me around again. "I want you to look good and hard, so you'll know what I see, Sam Houston."

Well, Lady Bird finally managed to get him out of my room, and I went back to sleep wondering if I really did look that awful when I tied one on.

That incident happened many years after we had moved from the house on Kalorama Road. As I said before, it was an unpretentious place that reflected Lyndon's modest income as a congressman with no personal wealth. There were several things that never got repaired or improved for lack of money, and I particularly remember the creaky ninth step on the front stairway leading to the upstairs bedrooms. Lyndon left it that way—because

that damned noisy step always gave me away when I came home late and not entirely sober. Several times, I offered to pay a handyman from my own pocket, but Lyndon wouldn't let me. Consequently, I sometimes used the noiseless back stairs, coming through the basement bedroom occupied by our wonderful cook and housekeeper, Zephyr Wright. If ever I saw her light on, I would tap on her door, and she would wave me through her room with that knowing grin that all of us sinners share in common. She was my constant ally and frequently allowed me to hide my bottle of gin in her closet. Naturally, whenever I could, I would do her a favor.

IN THE SPRING OF 1941, my brother decided to run for senator.

It was a close election, with Lyndon leading by 5,000 votes after 96 percent of the ballots had been counted on the second day after the polls closed. Then, for reasons I have always suspected, a few remote outlying counties came in with tallies strongly supporting W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel. He won by a margin of 1,311 votes out of a total of nearly 600,000. I urged Lyndon to demand a recount. Knowing such measures are seldom, if ever, successful, he merely shrugged. "You can't win 'em all, Sam," he said. "There's always another ball game."



Bobby Baker and I arranged to "draft" Lyndon as minority leader

HE HAD TO WAIT SEVEN more years for that next ball game, the famous senatorial election of 1948. In spite of his fevered activity on Capitol Hill, there was a certain dissatisfaction brewing inside of him, and he occasionally talked about returning to Texas to get into a line of work that would yield a better income (and more security) than his congressional job. Lady Bird had invested most of her inheritance in a radio station, and they were both anxious to expand into television.

As the 1948 primary drew near, he was still contemplating a new, nonpolitical career. Thus, in May of that year, he went back to Austin to announce that he would not run for the Senate. But on the very last day for filing, just a few hours before the deadline, a group of young liberals finally persuaded him to make the race. His principal opponent was the conservative, popular Gov. Coke Stevenson.

Taking to the air in a helicopter equipped with huge loudspeakers, Lyndon zoomed and flitted over the whole damned state, dropping into little pump-water towns where nobody had ever seen one of those crazy flying machines.

Coke got 477,077 votes to Lyndon's 405,617. Nine other candidates got a combined total of 320,000 votes, thereby forcing a runoff between the two front-runners. Lyndon won by only 87 votes (494,191 votes to 494,104), probably the narrowest landslide in any Senate election, at least in this century. Those figures alone clearly indicate that neither

Coke's nor Lyndon's people tampered with the vote. If you're going to steal an election, you sure don't fool around with a piddling margin of 87 votes.

With charges and countercharges coming from all angles, the Democratic State Executive Committee met in Austin to officially certify the results. When the initial tally was announced—28 to 28—I suddenly noticed that one of our supporters was absent (let's call him Jim Smith). Remembering that I had seen him headed for the upstairs men's room, wobbling a bit from one drink too many, I rushed into the lavatory section and found him soaking his head in a washbasin. "For Crissakes, Jim," I hollered. "Get back in that committee room. We need your damned vote."

A couple of minutes later, Jim slowly—but very erectly—walked into the room and cast the deciding vote for Lyndon. Thereafter, practically everyone on our side took credit for rounding up old Jim, and my brother made good use of their willingness to do so. Wherever he went, he would take someone aside (30 or 40 people eventually) and whisper, "I understand it was you that got Jim Smith outa that bathroom." Feigning just a shade of modesty, Walter or Joe or Roger would say, "Well, it weren't much, Lyndon—but that damned Jim's sure tough to handle when he's had a snort. Yessiree."

Coke Stevenson challenged the election in both the state and Federal courts, but Lyndon was cooler than a cucumber. "We'll have to get Abe on this," he said. "Ain't a smarter lawyer in the country."

He was referring, of course, to Abe Fortas. Besides knowing all the ins and outs of the Federal bureaucracy, Abe was also a brilliant appellate lawyer—just the kind of man who could take this problem all the way to the Supreme Court, if necessary, or to tie Coke Stevenson's lawyers into knots at the District Court level. That's exactly what he did. Within a short time, he had the case thrown out of court, putting Lyndon back on the ballot for the general election in November.

There has always been a lot of cynical speculation about that 1948 election, with some columnists dropping hints of back-door machinations. Had there been any, you can bet your last penny the press would have headlined it in huge letters. I might add, incidentally, that the news media were never as curious about the Illinois (Cook County) vote for John F. Kennedy in 1960, although the Republicans raised a stink about heavy voting from long abandoned empty lots. Like all human beings, newspapermen have their favorites and un-favorites, and I doubt that Lyndon could be placed in the first category.

NOW THAT WE HAVE BROACHED the subject of ethics, I wonder how many people (politicians, businessmen, reporters, lawyers, TV repairmen, auto salesmen, doctors, mechanics, entertainers, bellboys, professors, et al) can look in the mirror and seriously say, "There is a completely moral human being." How can a business executive, who cheats on his expense account to buy himself a \$100 call girl, get so sanctimonious about Adam Clayton Powell? And how about the auto mechanic who charges catalog prices for used parts, then triples the bill? And all the other day-to-day cheats who get horrified when some politician goes astray? And, of course, the politicians themselves are the most sanctimonious hypocrites when one of their colleagues gets into trouble. They get on the floor of the House

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or the Senate and let their voices quiver with holier-than-thouness, then rush out to the airport to catch a plane for Europe to investigate student morals in Paris at Government expense.

Even those politicians (Federal or local) who play it straight-and-narrow in financial matters have different kinds of skeletons in their closets. There isn't a single officeholder who hasn't stepped on someone climbing up the ladder, who hasn't double-crossed a friend, who hasn't fudged on his campaign promises, who hasn't committed some act that nibbles at his conscience in the middle of the night. There were a lot of dismayed columnists who jumped on Bobby Kennedy for suddenly announcing his candidacy for President right after Sen. Eugene McCarthy's victory in New Hampshire, calling him ruthless and opportunistic for robbing poor old Gene of his hour of triumph. I don't know why they were so surprised; Bobby was completely in character—a cool, ambitious politician who moved when he had to—and to hell with ethical considerations. Ambition and egotism are the twin names of the game; without them, no man enters public life. And successful, ambitious men, no matter what field they are in, are seldom deterred by mere scruple. It may be that the electoral process, especially when an officeholder has to offer himself for public approval every two or four or six years, accentuates the need for driving ambition and blows up the ego to ridiculous proportions. The pretense of modesty in a politician is pure sham. Truly modest people don't grab at strangers' hands in supermarkets, nor do they worry about their best profile before a TV camera.

WHEN HE ENTERED THE Senate in 1949, my brother was unusually sensitive about his colleagues' high opinions of themselves and was mighty damn careful not to bruise anyone's ego. He quickly accepted the club rule that new senators should be seen and not heard. But, since most of the incumbent senators were tired old men, Lyndon also realized that a conscientious hardworking freshman could make his mark in the Senate. Before the year was over, quite a few older senators had asked Lyndon's advice on how to push through a particular law favoring their states.

Lyndon was elected majority whip in 1951 by a unanimous vote of his Democratic colleagues. No one had ever risen to that position in so short a time. Sen. Ernest McFarland of Arizona was majority leader, and he relied heavily on Lyndon's tactical know-how. He was a frequent visitor at the Johnson home, dropping by for a highball and long strategy talks on Senate business. One evening, as my brother was explaining how to speed a pending bill through a stubborn committee, McFarland leaned back in his chair and said, "Damn it, Lyndon, you ought to have my job—you know a helluva lot more about it than I do." But Lyndon shrugged aside the suggestion. "I'm happy where I am, Ernie—just helping you."

Ironically enough, McFarland's half-wish came true about a year later. He was defeated by Barry Goldwater in the Eisenhower landslide of 1952, which also gave the Republicans control of the Senate. Since Lyndon was still in his first term, just four years in the Senate, very few people expected him to become minority leader. Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia, who had much more seniority and strong Southern support, was the obvious choice.

But for reasons I've never figured out, Dick seemed reluctant to take over. Perhaps he expected to be drafted for the position, playing it shy so as to strengthen his hand later on—a tactic that I've always considered pretty damned foolish. Nobody ever gets drafted unless he arranges it himself.

That's exactly what we started doing for Lyndon: arranging a draft. I got together with Bobby Baker and worked out a kind of "me second" plan that later helped John Kennedy before the 1960 convention. Knowing it wouldn't look right for me to call people, we decided to let Bobby phone or personally contact all the Southern senators with this kind of pitch:

"Senator, this is Bobby Baker calling. It's about this minority leader situation, sir."

"Why sure, son," the senator would say. "I imagine you're thinking about Lyndon."

"Not exactly, sir," Bobby would say. "Senator Johnson really thinks Dick Russell ought to take it, sir. But we understand he doesn't want it. If Senator Russell won't take it, looks like Hubert Humphrey or one of them Northerners will get it."

"Huh, we can't have that, Bobby!"

"That's what some of us have been thinking, sir. If it can't be Russell, we sure ought to get someone like Lyndon. Draft him, if necessary. That Humphrey thing kinda scares me."

Remembering Hubert's performance as a Young Turk at the 1948 convention, that's all those Southerners had to hear.

I had an off-the-record talk with the Washington correspondent of the Dallas News, the most powerful newspaper in the state. "Understand now," I told him. "This minority leader race has narrowed down to Lyndon and Hubert Humphrey, and you know how Hubert stands on oil depletion."

That, of course, struck close to home.

"But my brother doesn't want it," I continued. "He's got too damned many other things to think about. With old [Gov. Allan] Shivers coming at him next year, he's gonna have to spend a lotta time back home, mending those fences that got tore up when he opposed Ike."

When the Dallas News came out the next morning, headlining the threat of Humphrey in large type, there was stack-up traffic on the long-distance wires between Dallas-Houston and Lyndon's office. On and on, one call after another from powerful Texans who were urging Lyndon to run for minority leader "to keep that damned pinko outa there." And I watched my brother fencing with each one, expressing his need to spend a lot of time in Texas during the coming year to prepare for a primary fight against Allan Shivers. Each one, he later told me, gave him the same assurance.

"Don't you worry about Allan. He ain't gonna run against you. We'll take care of that."

Then Shivers himself—obviously at their prompting—phoned to assure Lyndon that he was quite content to go on living at the Governor's mansion in Austin.

With the Shivers threat apparently eliminated, Lyndon let it be known he was available for minority leader. And a couple days before the caucus of Democratic senators, the newly elected junior senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, came by the office to tell my brother that he intended to vote for him. Kennedy was wearing a loose sweater and casual slacks, his hair slightly disheveled, mak-

ing him look much too young for the Senate. "Seems like a nice kid," Lyndon said after Kennedy had left. "Probably has a good future ahead of him."

The so-called Humphrey threat, which Bobby Baker and I had "worried" about, had never really amounted to a puddle of warm spit. Hubert naturally tried to make it seem more important than it was, even to the point of personally conferring with Lyndon about certain committee assignments in exchange for his support. Hubert phoned my brother about a half hour before the caucus, once again pressing for a few concessions. Rising to his feet with the phone clutched in his right hand (when Lyndon stands up for a phone conversation, that's a sure sign he's mad), Lyndon snapped at the mouthpiece: "Goddamn it, Hubert, I wasted enough time with you yesterday. So you can take your lousy eight votes and do what you please."

A few minutes later, he was escorted into the caucus room by all the big guns in the Senate and got elected unanimously. At 44, Lyndon was the youngest man ever to be named floor leader of the Senate by either major party and the only one so designated during his first term.

Lyndon said of Joe McCarthy: "He's a sonofabitch, but a sort of charming one."

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE the 1954 Senate election, Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin came by the office to let Lyndon know that he would be going out to Houston the next day to give a "majors speech" on foreign policy at a meeting of rich, conservative Texans. "Tell me what you want me to do, Lyndon," McCarthy said, with a knowing glint in his eyes. "I can speak for you or against you, whatever you say."

"You do what you please," said my brother. "Doesn't make a bit of difference to me."

When McCarthy had left, Lyndon turned to me with a slight frown on his face. "He's a sonofabitch, all right, but a sort of charming one in his crazy weasel way. But what I can't understand is why Ike doesn't blast him for the things he's been saying about General Marshall. There ought to be some loyalty there. After all, it was Marshall who gave Ike his big chance in Europe. And now he just sits by and lets McCarthy smear his old friend as a 'Communist dupe' without a word of protest. He even endorsed Joe for reelection [in 1952]. How do you figure that one, Sam Houston?"

I used to see McCarthy quite frequently in the bar of the Carroll Arms Hotel, across the street from the Senate. He would be taking one drink after another with two or three friends, gulping them down in quick order, never quite losing his equilibrium but getting more talkative and boisterous with each new drink. He wouldn't go into a stupor or mumble or anything like that; he just got more animated. But after he was censured by the Senate, the liquor really got to him. That's when he seemed

continued

wild and unintelligible. McCarthy even appeared drunk on the floor of the Senate, often staggering down the aisle, mumbling apologies to fellow senators, who simply ignored him, turning their backs as he approached.

WITHOUT THE MAGIC EISENHOWER name at the top of their ticket, the Republicans stumbled a bit in the 1954 elections, giving the Democrats control of the Senate. Thus, at the age of 46, Lyndon Johnson was the youngest man ever to serve as Senate majority leader. He also became the country's greatest practitioner of consensus politics. Arguing, pleading, flattering, compromising, reminding Senator X of some past favor and hinting a future favor to Senator Y, he masterminded a steady flow of legislation through the various committees and into the Senate chamber. He knew the personal likes and dislikes, the strengths and weaknesses of every man in the Senate, as well as the special needs and demands of their particular states. Once, when Senator Kennedy told him that he would support Lyndon on a particular bill "even if it means going against the interests of my state," my brother shook his head. "I would never let you do that, Jack. Your first duty is to represent your people. I never ask a man to vote for me when it means going against his constituents." And though he may have been disappointed, Lyndon never said a word of criticism (at least to anyone on his staff) when Senator Kennedy refused to vote in favor of the censure of Joe McCarthy. He probably realized that Kennedy had certain family pressures to contend with.

Yet in spite of his readiness to understand the weaknesses and foibles of his Senate colleagues, Lyndon was a bit more demanding with members of his personal staff. They had to work long extra hours, often neglecting their home lives. "An eight-hour man ain't worth a damn to me," he often said. They also were constantly threatened with "being fired" for some slight infraction. I put quotation marks around "being fired" because my brother didn't really fire people; that was just Lyndon's way (admittedly unpleasant) of showing his displeasure with somebody's work. Whenever he put on the "you're fired" act, I would have to tell the person that Lyndon didn't really mean it—to take the rest of the afternoon off and come back tomorrow.

After a while, some people on the staff began to refer to me as "general counsel for the frequently fired employees of Lyndon Johnson," and I've always said that anyone who worked for my brother

for at least a month deserved the Purple Heart.

As a consequence of this attitude, some of his staff members were apt to develop into nervous, humorless drones, plodding along with a wary eye on the boss—afraid to displease him, certainly afraid to criticize him. Small wonder that he has often been surrounded by sycophants who have deliberately failed to express their doubts about policies they have privately disagreed with, wanting only to hang on to their jobs.

MANY PEOPLE DID STAY with him for years and years. I guess they knew that Lyndon, despite his demands on their time, could be more compassionate than most employers, that he really cared for them as human beings. Quite frequently, when he had scolded someone and later realized he was wrong, he would shower that person with kindness and great generosity. He might send a secretary on a short extra vacation to Florida or give an administrative aide extra money for his children's dental work. Some of his staff members openly wished they would get the next bawling out, thinking he might give them something special, because that was his way of apologizing. I doubt that he has ever been able—even as a small boy—to make a straightforward, direct apology. If there is anything tragic about my brother, I would guess it's his profound inability to say those simple words, "I'm sorry."

This particular trait, when combined with a quick temper and instant generosity, made him a puzzling person to work for. His more sensitive staff people found it especially difficult. One of them, a hard-working man

When Lyndon tried to call me from the White House, he was interrupted for a hurry-up conference with Rusk and McNamara.

whose wife deeply resented Lyndon because her husband was seldom home for supper, developed a bleeding ulcer and a twitch in his left eye. (Let's call him Miller Bryant.) On two or three occasions, I hinted that he should find another job, knowing that he was a highly employable public relations man. But he never took the hint. He had a curious loyalty to my brother.

Then one afternoon, just after Lyndon became majority leader, a very prominent Texas industrialist (call him Clem Foley) came into my office and asked me to become his representative in Washington at a very handsome salary. "Lobbyist," some people call it. Well, in view of Lyndon's position and his probable intention to run for President someday, I knew I couldn't possibly accept such a politically vulnerable job. But I knew who could. Pointing

through the door at Miller Bryant, I said, "There's your man. Good friend of Lyndon's, damned fine worker and plenty of know-how about Congress. But don't let him know who recommended him. And you'd better check with Lyndon before you offer the job."

An hour later, my brother buzzed me to come into his office. "That damned Miller's been looking for another job," he said. "Clem Foley just told me he wants to hire him."

Knowing that Lyndon never likes anyone to quit on him, I told him it was my idea. "This job's liable to bust up his home," I said. "You ought to let him take Foley's offer. He needs a break."

Shortly after that, Miller phoned me from a pay booth and told me Foley had offered him \$20,000 per year, almost three times what he was then making. "You better take it," I said. "But you'd better get Lyndon's OK first. You won't be worth a damn as Foley's representative if the majority leader's annoyed with you."

Lyndon had gone home early that day to pack for a trip out west, so I advised Miller to call him right away, and I got his permission to listen in.

"How much is he offering you?" asked Lyndon, after Miller had told him about the job offer.

"Twenty thousand a year," said Miller.

"That's not enough," said Lyndon. "Tell that old bastard he's got to give you \$25,000 plus another \$3,000 for expenses—otherwise I won't let you go."

A few minutes later, his fingers trembling as he dialed the number, Miller called Foley and repeated Lyndon's exact words—leaving out the "bastard."

"Why sure," said Foley. "I think that's a right fair figure. When can you start?"

My brother grinned from ear to ear when I told him about the conversation. "I should have said thirty-plus-five."

ONE AFTERNOON, LYNDON CAME by my apartment as I was watching a rerun of the McClellan Committee hearings on the Huntley-Brinkley newscast. In this particular segment, Bobby Kennedy, as committee counsel, was badgering Jimmy Hoffa in a nasty, sarcastic manner that some people later called "ruthless." There was something holier-than-thou in his expression, a moral snobbery that rough prosecutors almost always have. Never an ounce of compassion. And I wondered how a son of Joseph P. Kennedy could consider himself all that holy. I'm happy to say that Hoffa snapped back at him, that he didn't cringe the way Dave Beck did.

There was something else I noticed on that newscast: Sen. John Kennedy was sitting close to his little brother and would occasionally pass him a note. It was obvious he didn't object at all to Bobby's bullyboy tactics, yet he himself remained serenely out of it, letting his brother do the less savory work.

"There's your main opposition in 1960," I said to Lyndon, referring to the Democratic presidential nomination. "These hearings are the opening gun. He's letting Bobby scare the hell out of labor, so they won't dare oppose him. Hoffa and Beck have supported Republicans up to now, so he's not worried about them. But you know damn well the Democratic labor leaders are getting the message."

"You're too cynical about the Kennedys. Bobby's kinda tough, but Jack looks all right."

"That's just the point, Lyndon," I said. "He's getting the benefit of his little brother's prosecuting

without soiling himself. He's running for President right now."

"Oh, I don't know about that. He might want to be Vice President—but that's about all."

JOHN F. KENNEDY BAGGED the 1960 Democratic nomination for President at least a month before the convention. With a highly financed new-style machine that was run with brutal efficiency by brother Bobby, he swept through primary after primary while Lyndon sat in Washington hoping his old alliances in the House and Senate would grab the prize for him in a tight convention. He thought, for example, that Sen. Thomas Dodd would line up the Connecticut delegation. So did Tom. Neither of them knew that John Bailey, the state chairman, had put together a slate favoring Kennedy. Several other senators and congressmen had given my brother the same innocent assurances: "Don't you worry about the people in my state, Lyndon—I'll have 'em for you when the time comes."

With such ill-founded promises to bolster him, Lyndon stayed away from the primary races, never entered a single one. He knew, as does everyone, that it's possible to win all the open primaries and still lose the nomination, because most of the delegates are chosen in closed state conventions, usually under the tight control of party bosses. Obviously, Jack and Bobby Kennedy knew the same damned thing. They weren't banking solely on those primary elections; they had their people all over the country, burtonholing the party brass and thousands of delegates and potential delegates to those private conventions. But they also knew that a solid string of victories in those states that held open primaries would undoubtedly affect the attitudes of delegates to the closed conventions. After all, *electability* has to be a most important consideration in picking a candidate. So the Kennedys spent millions to prove JFK was electable.

Poor old Hubert Humphrey tried to stop the Kennedy juggernaut in West Virginia, apparently thinking that his tattered empty-pocket sincerity would be more appealing to the impoverished miners and hungry farmers than the sleek, obvious wealth of his opponent.

He couldn't have been more mistaken. Democratic voters have always been fond of wealthy candidates like Franklin Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson and Jack Kennedy. As a matter of fact, every one of the major candidates at the 1960 Democratic convention except Humphrey was wealthy—Kennedy, Johnson, Stevenson, Symington. The party of the poor has always been hospitable to the very rich. Consequently, Humphrey's poor-boy effort in West Virginia was doomed to fail. And just to make sure he stayed poor, the Kennedy people reportedly cut off the small trickle of funds he was getting from New York by placing strategic calls to a few Eastern friends.

More than ever before, the 1960 campaign emphasized the crucial importance of big money in politics. Television had become the most effective contact between the voters and the candidates, and that's a medium that gobbles up money like a dollar slot machine in Vegas. Inevitably, this need for bigger and bigger money will taint the political process. When a candidate has to raise many thousands from a single fat cat, can anyone seriously believe those big contributors are merely interested in good government? There isn't a single mayor, councilman,

state legislator, governor, congressman, President or any other elected official in this country who hasn't gotten a contribution from some fat cat expecting a Government contract somewhere down the line. I find it hard to imagine Joe Smith giving a \$10,000 check to Congressman X's campaign without expecting a wee little something in return.

Lyndon said of JFK:
"Some people around
him are bastards, but he's
treated me all right."

AFTER HIS NOMINATION for the Presidency, Kennedy was free to choose anyone he wished as a running mate. Lyndon certainly didn't expect to be chosen. He had rubbed a sensitive nerve when he reminded certain liberals that Kennedy had not voted to censure Sen. Joe McCarthy, and the Kennedys weren't known as easy forgivers—certainly not Bobby. Yet, in spite of Bobby's strong objections, John Kennedy obviously realized he needed Lyndon Johnson. As a Catholic attempting to overcome an historical bias against people of his faith, he particularly needed someone to boost him in the Bible Belt of the South and Southwest. Lyndon was reluctant. He wanted to be damned sure, he later told me back at the ranch, that Kennedy really wanted him over the long haul and not just for the fall election.

The final results clearly show that Kennedy knew what he was doing when he insisted on having Lyndon as his running mate. Without the electoral votes of Texas and two or three Southern states, JFK would never have become President. In those particular states, it was Johnson carrying Kennedy.

Lyndon no doubt expected some show of gratitude from the Kennedys and their covey of New Frontiersmen. Instead, they made his stay in the Vice Presidency the most miserable three years of his life. He wasn't the number-two man in that administration, he was the lowest man on the totem pole. Though he has never said this to anyone (perhaps because his pride would never let him admit it), I know him well enough to know he felt humiliated time and time again, that he was openly snubbed by second-echelon White House staffers who snickered at him behind his back and called him Uncle Cornpone. Some of their smart-aleck jokes extended to my sister-in-law. Supposedly civilized New Frontiersmen had a great time repeating Jacqueline Kennedy's remark that "Lady Bird would crawl down Pennsylvania Avenue on broken glass for Lyndon." However, I imagine Lady Bird would do just that for my brother. So, might I add, would Eleanor Roosevelt, Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower for their husbands. Still, I'm not too surprised that Mrs. Onassis would look down her elegant nose at that kind of wifely loyalty.

THE NEW FRONTIER crowd took over with a bang: An army of so-called "beautiful, beautiful people" invaded the official and social life of Washington

hoping to change things overnight. They no doubt exercised a considerable influence on the social side of the capital. I have even heard my brother's family ridiculed because they didn't have a fancy French chef in the kitchen, as if eating snails in garlic sauce will make you more civilized and human than eating plain meat and potatoes.

The New Frontiersmen's influence on the governmental side was considerably less. None of them knew much about the legislative process. The Kennedys had easy access to the greatest legislative strategist of this century, Lyndon Johnson, but they refused to use him. Instead, there was a swarm of young, conceited New Frontiersmen running around Capitol Hill trying to tell elderly congressmen "this is the way it's got to be."

For his own good, John Kennedy should have made Lyndon his number-two man. Instead, he chose to rely on Bobby, whose only congressional experience was working for Sen. Joe McCarthy and Senator McClellan. Bobby's tough prosecutor roles were the worst kind of training for a man who's going to stage-manage a legislative program. Yet the New Frontiersmen somehow managed to create an aura of great accomplishment, smugly congratulating each other at hundreds of fancy cocktail parties for those beautiful, beautiful "in" people who seemed to have an endless supply of Lyndon jokes. The most popular witicism was, "Say, whatever happened to LBJ?"

Although they were obviously referring to my brother's nowhere status in the Washington hierarchy, their question had a certain relevance in respect to his physical whereabouts. He became the most traveled Vice President in history, visiting at least 33 foreign countries. Quite often he would ask Lady Bird to go along, knowing that she had a way with strangers. Lynda and Luci would stay at home in Washington or at the ranch on the Pedernales River, resenting their parents' frequent absences. Luci has said that she remembers screaming and stomping her feet because her mother would be taken away by Lyndon for some political rally.

"My resentment was aimed at him," she told a reporter, "because he seemed to be always taking my mother away, and I knew I loved her. Even when my father was around, I'm afraid I didn't do much to help our relationship. So eventually he stopped trying too. This bothered Mama a great deal. She really tried to smooth things over, and to keep us a closely knit family. She loved us both and tried to bring us together. She felt a sense of loyalty to Father; but she also felt a tremendous sense of conscience toward my sister and me. Quite often, she was torn between the two obligations."

"Finally," she said, "I decided: why buck it? So I stopped thinking of him as a father and started thinking of him as a friend. Eventually, I learned to love him as a person—not as a father, because he seldom had time to be a father."

THERE WAS ALWAYS A DEEP reluctance on Lyndon's part to say anything publicly that might be taken as a criticism of the President. For all the galling humiliation he suffered during the most miserable three years of his life, he had a stubborn kind of loyalty to his chief. What's more—as my ex-wife soon found out—he wouldn't tolerate other people criticizing Kennedy in his presence.

Having just returned from Europe, where she was working for our State Department, Mary was continued

invited to have dinner with Lady Bird and Lyndon at the Elms. Naturally assuming that Lyndon deeply resented the Kennedys, Mary told him that a lot of people in Europe apparently hated or distrusted the President. She even went so far as to repeat a harmless joke about the Kennedy clan. That's when my brother exploded.

"Listen here," he said, with sudden anger, "you're making cracks about the man you're working for. If you don't like the President, then why don't you quit your job? You have no business holding that position if you can't be loyal to him."

"But I'm only an office worker..." she started to say.

"That makes no difference," Lyndon snapped. "Either quit talking about him that way or quit your job!"

Since it was fairly common knowledge that he was getting pretty shabby treatment around the White House, such fierce loyalty seemed rather odd and a bit strained. But he had always felt that way: An employee owes complete loyalty to his employer.

He himself always demanded complete loyalty from his subordinates. Any shade of criticism or lack of enthusiasm from any staff member could be suspect. He might tolerate sloppiness and occasional stupidity from someone who was dedicated, but his most able people would be leery of crossing him on even the most impersonal matters, no matter how justified their criticism might be. A staffer's duty was to carry out instructions—not to challenge them.

"You better watch out for that guy," he once told me, referring to some senator's administrative aide who had made a harmless crack about his chief. "Anyone who talks that way about the man he's working for can't be trusted. He would double-cross you a lot easier."

His attitude is particularly ironic when you pause to consider the highly publicized hopes of certain Kennedy associates to "dump Lyndon in 1964." At least ten Washington columnists hinted or said outright that Bobby Kennedy was pressuring his brother to get a new vice presidential candidate for the coming election and that he was hoping the Bobby Baker scandal would provide the "right reason" for doing so. It should be noted, incidentally, that no one—despite the most exhaustive investigations—has ever linked my brother to any of the deals for which Bobby Baker was later indicted. They all occurred after he had quit working for Lyndon.

On two or three occasions, I had long discussions with Lyndon about his future plans. I asked him about the Bobby rumors (both Bobbys), and he shrugged them aside.

"That's just newspaper talk, Sam Houston. They're always doing that. Some columnists think that if they speculate hard enough about something, they can actually make it happen."

"Sometimes they do," I said.

"Not this time," he said. "Jack Kennedy has personally told me that he wants me to stay on the team. Some of the people around him are bastards, but I think he's treated me all right. He's had me briefed by Rusk and some of the other Cabinet members, and I especially like Dean Rusk. He's a damned good man. Hardworking, bright and loyal as a beagle. You'll never catch him working at cross purposes with his President. He's just the kind of man I'd want on my Cabinet if I were President."

Little did my brother know that he would have

his own Cabinet within a few short months.

AT THE VERY MOMENT President Kennedy was shot, I was having lunch with Oscar Bobbitt, my brother-in-law, at his home in Austin, Tex.

The telephone rang as we were about to have our soup. Almost instantly, he let out a gasp, and the phone nearly dropped from his hand.

"For God's sake, what's happened?" I asked.

"Lyndon's been shot," he said. "So has Kennedy."

The news department of the local television station had called to give us the first fragmentary reports, which indicated that my brother, rather than Gov. John Connally, was the second victim.

We were still on the phone catching a relay of news bulletins from the TV station when more detailed reports clearly indicated that Lyndon had not been wounded.

As I watched Lyndon taking the oath of office with Jackie Kennedy standing at his side with vacant, staring eyes, I was overwhelmed with a sadness so heavy I could hardly bear it. In spite of all my resentment against the Kennedys, I broke down and wept for John Kennedy and his family. And it wasn't only Kennedy I was sorry for—I was also sorry for my brother, who had just taken over the most thankless job in the world.

IT WAS QUICKLY APPARENT that many of the Kennedy people deeply resented and even hated Lyndon simply because the assassination had occurred in Texas. Some of them were heard bitterly asking: "Who had the most to gain from Kennedy's death?" And when the TV camera focused on the faces of certain members of Kennedy's staff, and I saw the stiff coolness in their manner when my brother came near them, I had the gut feeling that Lyndon would never be able to break down that unforgiving personal resentment.

I hadn't minded being away from Washington during my brother's Vice Presidency because I wouldn't want to see him humiliated, but now that he was in the White House, I sorely regretted my physical incapacity. With my back almost constantly aching from walking with a pronounced limp or lugging a heavy built-up boot, I had to take more sedatives than one ought to take. Sometimes bourbon and gin were a lot more satisfactory.

Whenever things got too gloomy and oppressive, I might have to go on a toot to get away from it all. That's exactly how I felt a few days after Kennedy was killed. I had been a virtual recluse, holing up in my bedroom to get away from all the yak-yak of people dropping by to gawk at us. Then, when I couldn't stand it anymore, I called up my old friend Judge Jeff Willens (which, of course, isn't his real name) and asked him to join me for a quick holiday in San Antonio.

"I want to get away from everybody," I said.

"This damn house has been swarming with reporters and all kinds of sweet-weather friends."

"Sure, Sam, I'll be glad to. But where are you going to hide yourself, buddy?"

"That's easy," I said. "You get us a suite at the El Tropicano motel in your name, and we won't let anyone know I'm there except sister Becky. I want her to know in case Lyndon should call."

That afternoon, as we were getting settled into the largest suite available, I got a call from the White House. But when I got to the next room, the operator told me the call had been interrupted—that the President would call me back in a few minutes. Well, I waited on that bed for nearly two hours. I didn't think I should complicate matters by switching a call from one extension to another. So I just sat there, restless and annoyed, then finally amused at the prospect of hearing the operator gasp and stutter on hearing the President's voice. Finally the call came through, with the operator breathlessly saying, "It's him! It's the President of the United States calling." Then Lyndon's voice.

"Sorry about that first call. I got involved in a hurry-up conference with Rusk and McNamara, so I decided to wait till I got back home to call you. I'm still living at the Elms, you know. Just got in."

"I imagine you're pretty busy," I said.

"Never been busier," he said. "But I've been waiting for the chance to talk with you and to let you know how much I appreciate all you've done for me, Sam Houston. I wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for you."

"Lyndon, I had nothing to do with Oswald."

He gasped, sputtered and then exploded. My God, what an explosion! I have never heard him so angry. "Goddammit, Sam!" he shouted. "What the hell kind of a remark is that? Here I come all the way home to have a serious talk with you, and you come out with a damned stupid horrible crack like that! Why in hell can't you ever be serious, you crazy ass? You make your lousy sick jokes about everything. . . ." He went on like that, getting angrier and angrier, for about 20 minutes. I kept expecting him to slam the phone down. Finally, in a tired, somewhat despairing voice, he said, "I'll call you some other time."

I certainly couldn't blame him for bawling me out. He was dead right. There was no earthly justification for a remark like that, no possible explanation. I mention this incident now only because it reflects how my brother must have felt about all the ugly insinuations that were made about Kennedy's being killed in Texas, most of which he surely read or heard about in one form or another. He could blow up at me and thus release some of the tension, but what could he do about the persistent harers who were willing to spread the vilest rumors about him and all other Texans? I'm happy to say that Lyndon never mentioned my strange remark when he came home for the holidays. That Christmas was one of the happiest we ever had in our family, with all our kinfolk gathering at the ranch to celebrate. Thinking back on the wonderful holiday, I never would have dreamed the next few years would be so troubled.

In the next issue of LOOK, Sam Houston Johnson analyzes the reason for the credibility gap and tells how Lyndon got himself in trouble on Vietnam by listening to the wrong advisers.